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(54) **SECURE ACCESS FOR SENSITIVE DIGITAL INFORMATION**

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G06F 17/30 (2006.01)

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H04L 63/123; H04L 9/3252

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Primary Examiner — Kambiz Zand

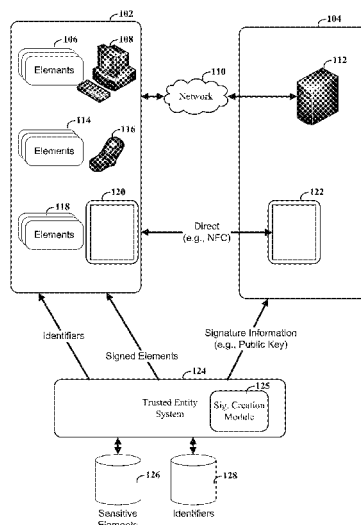
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

Sensitive pieces of information stored on an individual's device can be protected using a device identification system that applies, for each sensitive piece of information, a function that integrates an identifier of the individual with a respective sensitive piece of information to create a respective identity element. Each identity element can be signed with a signature to create a trust group. The identity element and signature can be uploaded to the individual's device using an application that is configured to provide a subset of the sensitive pieces of information in response to a query.

13 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets



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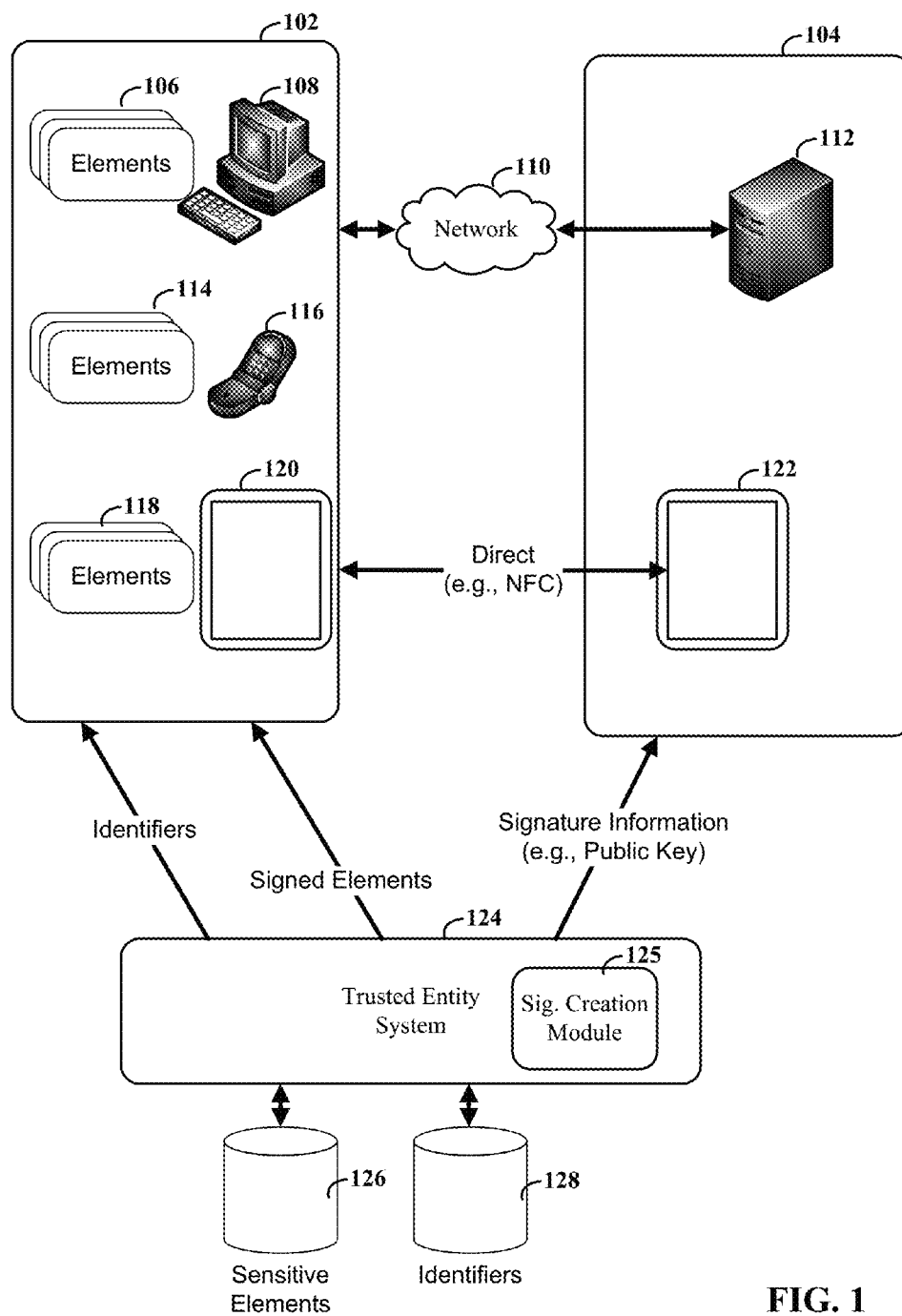


FIG. 1

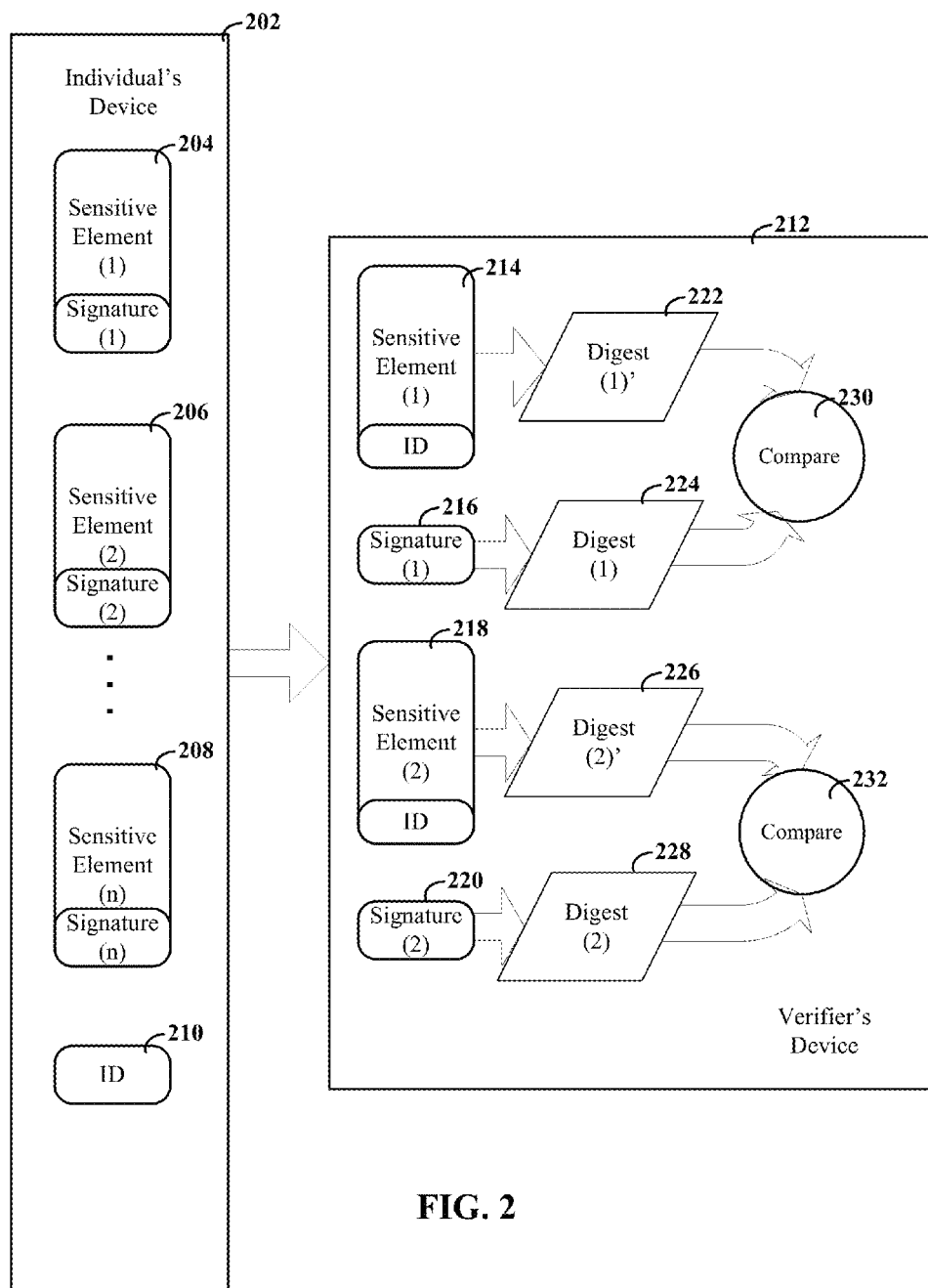


FIG. 2

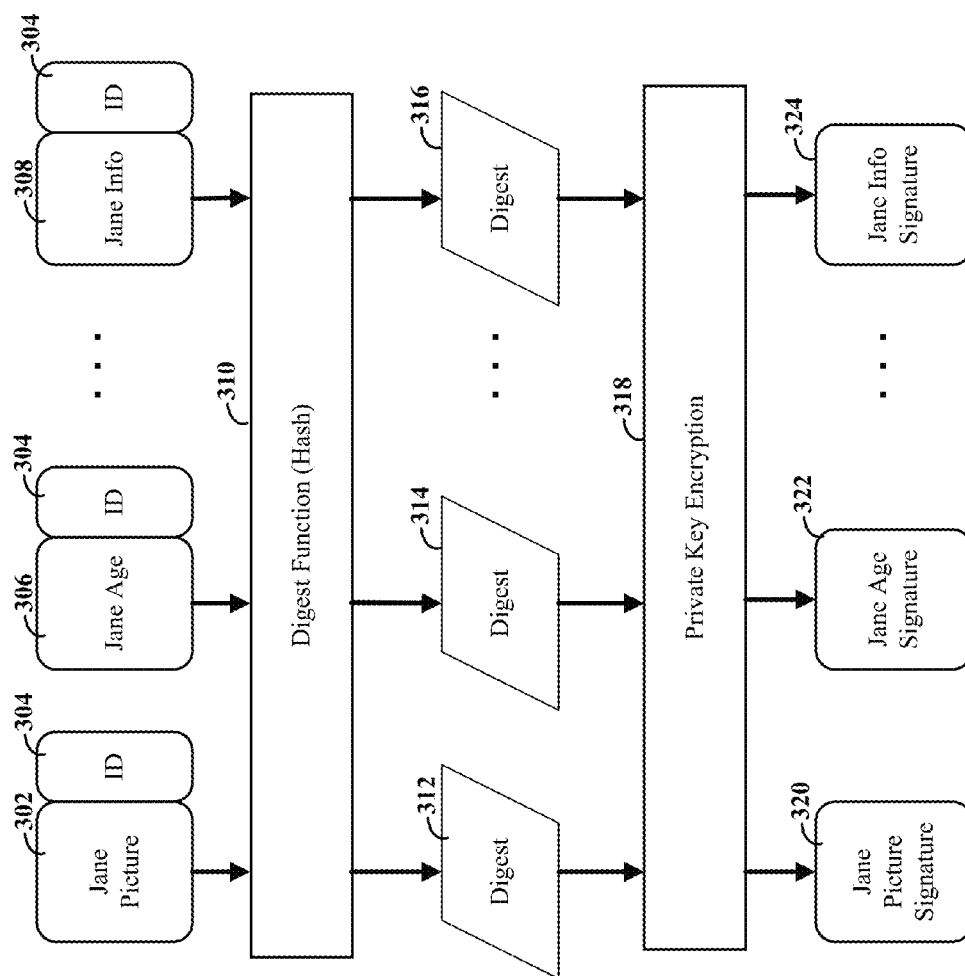


FIG. 3

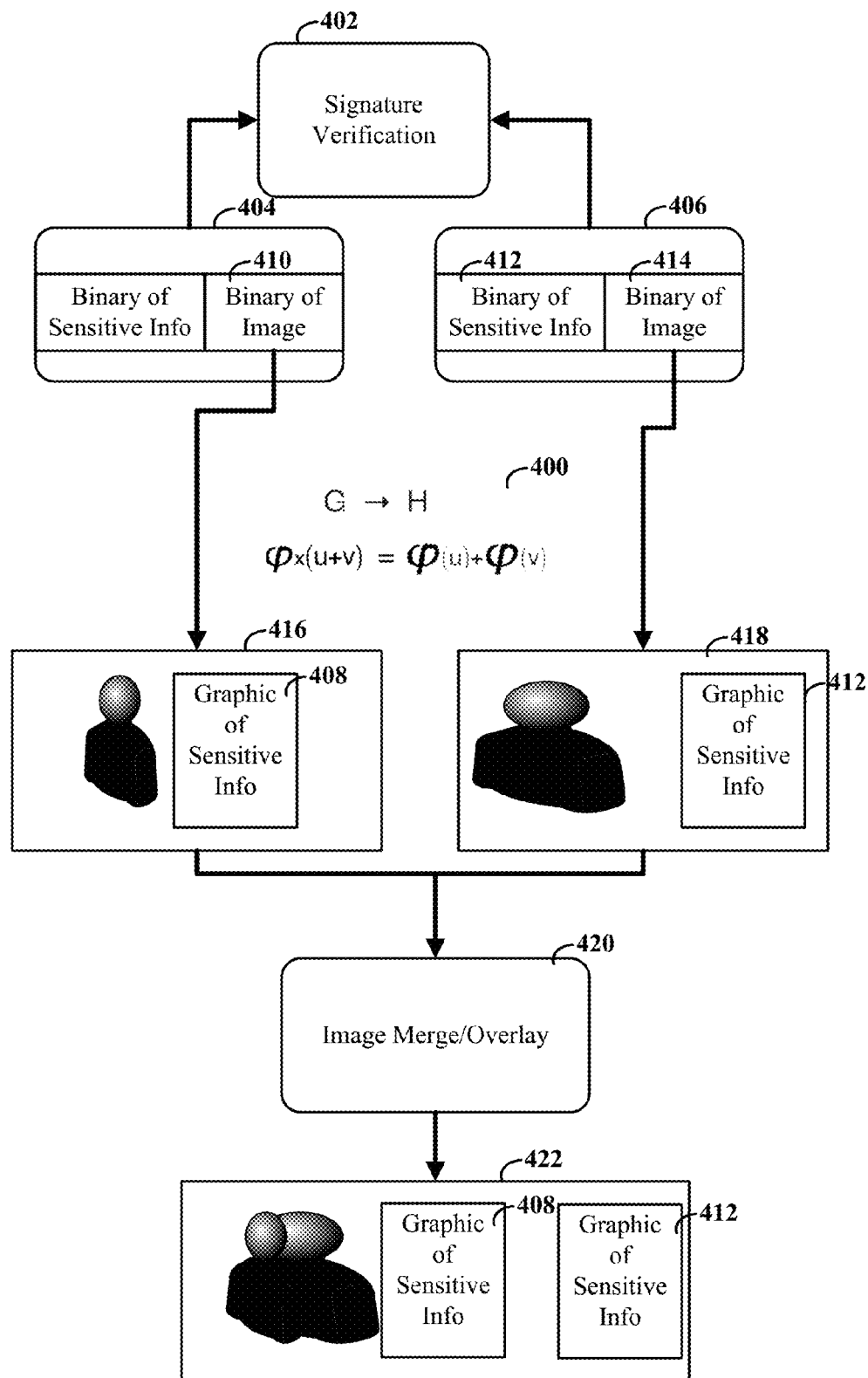
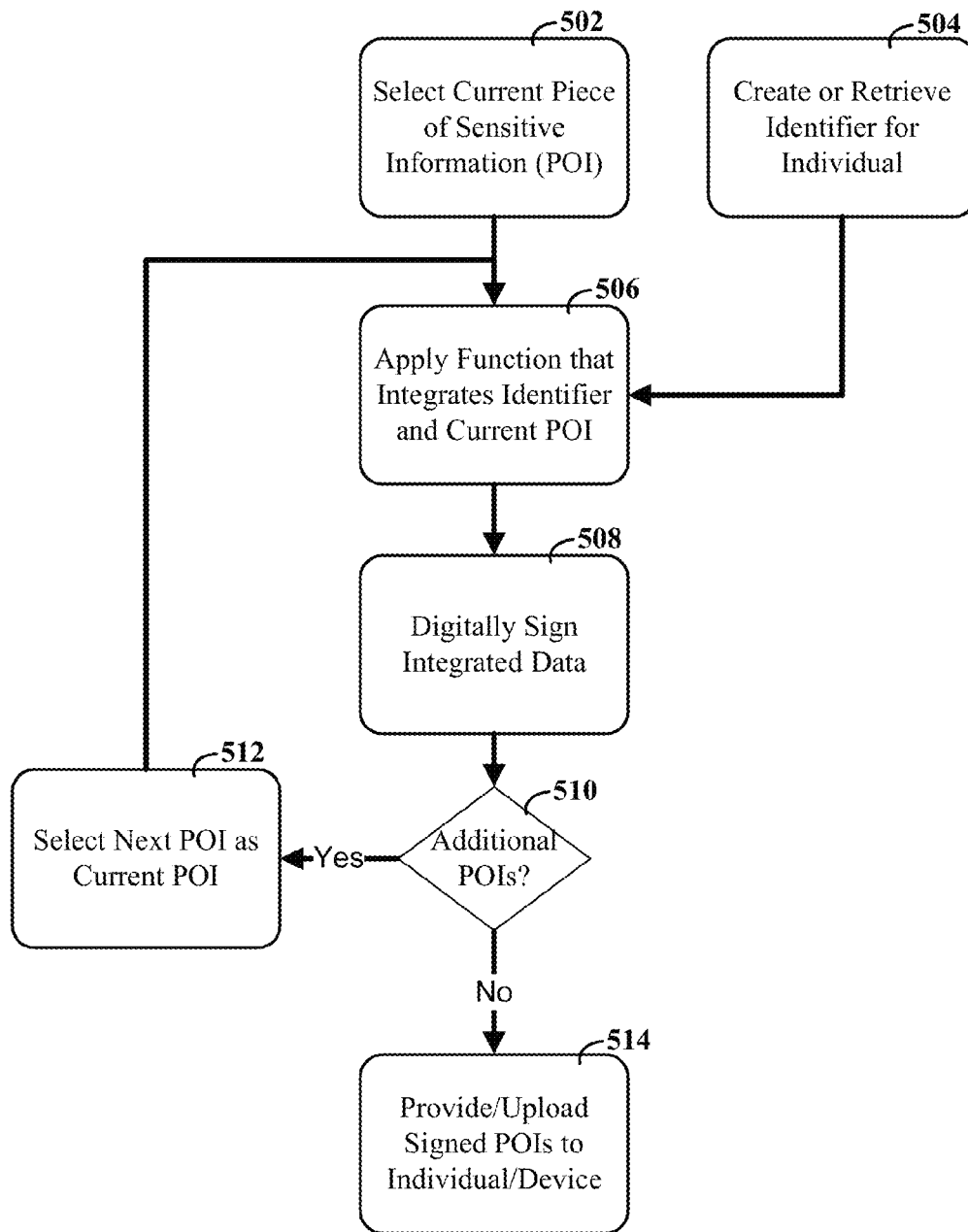
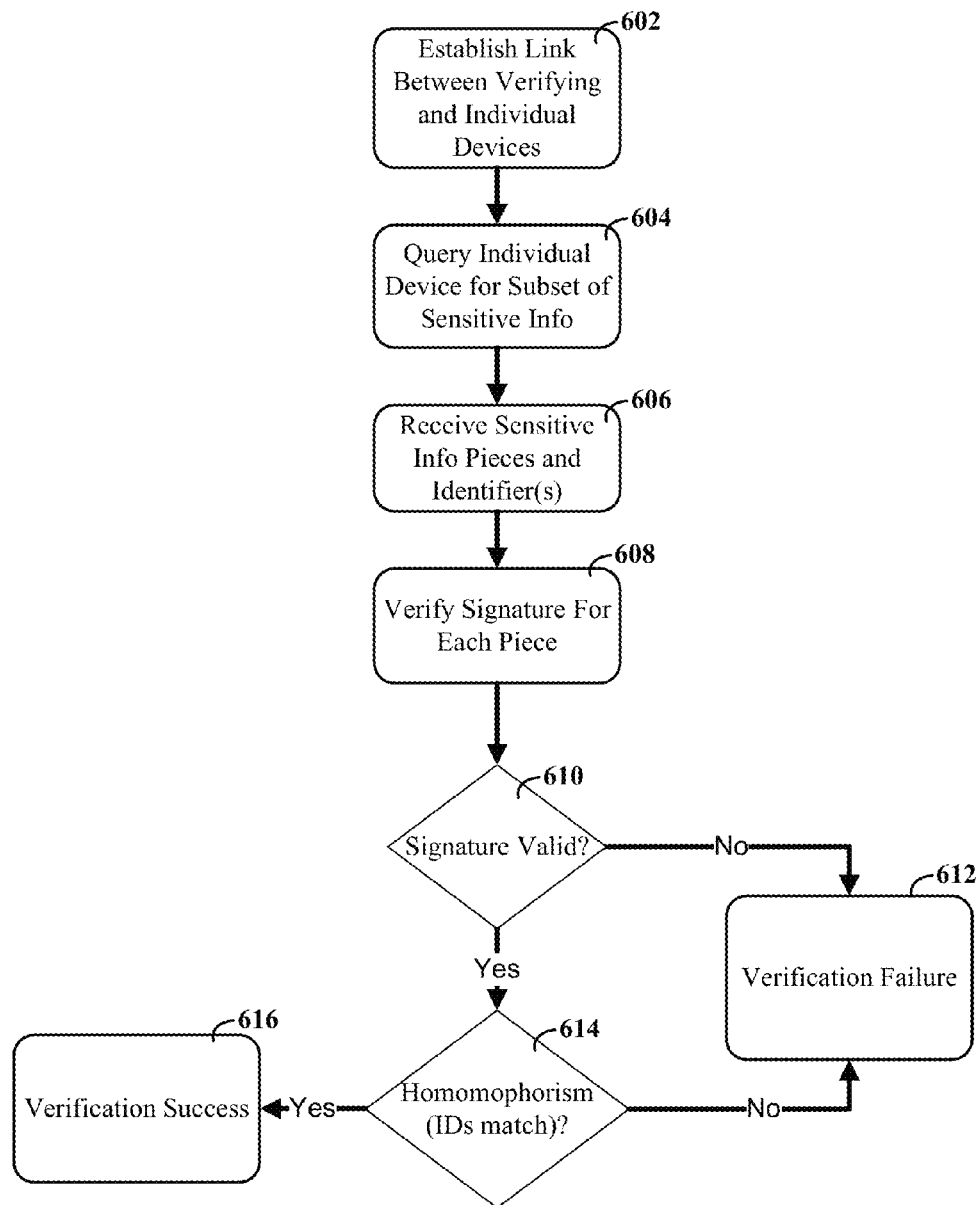


FIG. 4

**FIG. 5**

**FIG. 6**

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SECURE ACCESS FOR SENSITIVE DIGITAL INFORMATION

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

The present application is related to U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/154,615, entitled "SECURE ACCESS FOR SENSITIVE DIGITAL INFORMATION", filed Jan. 14, 2014, each of which is commonly owned with this application and the entire disclosures of each of which is incorporated by reference.

BACKGROUND

The present disclosure relates to verification of digital data elements, and more specifically, to verifying the integrity of relationships between digital data elements.

Cryptographic functions and algorithms can be used to help protect sensitive data, such as personal information about an individual. A first type of cryptographic function is a symmetric-key algorithm. Symmetric-key algorithms use the same cryptographic key for both encryption and decryption. Both the sending and receiving party should maintain the secrecy of the key in order to prevent a third party from gaining access to the encrypted information.

A second type of cryptographic function is an asymmetric-key algorithm. Asymmetric key algorithms can be used in a variety of manners. In one instance, a first party can encrypt data using a first (private) key. A second party can then decrypt the data using a second (public) key. This can be useful for verifying the source of the data as only the owner of the private key can encrypt data that will be decrypted using the associated public key. Alternatively, the second party could encrypt data using the public key and the first party can then decrypt the data using its private key. This can be helpful to ensure that only the owner of the private key can decrypt the data. The use of two different keys can be useful for a variety of different applications. In some instances, the first party can use the private key to create a digital signature. The second party can then use the public key and digital signature to verify that the contents of the data were sent by the first party and have not been modified.

SUMMARY

Embodiments are directed toward a method for protecting sensitive pieces of information stored on an individual's device and using a device identification system. The method includes applying, for each sensitive piece of information, a function that integrates an identifier of the individual with a respective sensitive piece of information to create a respective identity element; digitally signing each identity element with a signature to create a trust group; and uploading the identity element and signature to the individual's device using an application that is configured to provide a subset of the sensitive pieces of information in response to a query.

Various embodiments include a method for verifying sensitive pieces of information. The method includes establishing a communication link between a verification device and an individual's device that stores a plurality of sensitive pieces of information about the individual; sending, to the individual's device, a query for a subset that includes at least two of the plurality of sensitive pieces of information about the individual; receiving, in response to the query and at the verification device, the subset; receiving, in response to the query and at the verification device, an identifier of the indi-

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vidual; verifying that each piece of sensitive information of the subset belongs to a same trust group by: applying a signature algorithm to a first piece of sensitive information from the subset and to the identifier, applying the signature algorithm to a second piece of sensitive information from the subset and to the identifier, and verifying, based upon a result from the signature algorithm, that the first piece of sensitive information and the second piece of sensitive information belong to a trust group defined by the identifier.

Certain embodiments are directed toward a system comprising: a verification device designed to establish a communication link between a verification device and an individual's device that stores a plurality of sensitive pieces of information about the individual; send, to the individual's device, a query for a subset that includes at least two of the plurality of sensitive pieces of information about the individual; receive, in response to the query and at the verification device, the subset; receive, in response to the query and at the verification device, an identifier of the individual; verify that each piece of sensitive information of the subset belongs to a same trust group by: applying a signature algorithm to a first piece of sensitive information from the subset and to the identifier, applying the signature algorithm to a second piece of sensitive information from the subset and to the identifier, and verifying, based upon a result from the signature algorithm, that the first piece of sensitive information and the second piece of sensitive information belong to a trust group defined by the identifier.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 depicts a block diagram for system useful for securing sensitive data elements, consistent with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIG. 2 depicts a flow diagram for verifying trust of sensitive elements of an individual, consistent with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIG. 3 depicts a flow diagram for signing sensitive data elements using a homomorphism relating to a trust between the elements, consistent with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIG. 4 depicts a flow diagram for using a homomorphism that is based upon image files of individuals, consistent with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIG. 5 depicts a flow diagram for a process of generating a homomorphism between multiple pieces of sensitive information, consistent with embodiments of the present disclosure; and

FIG. 6 depicts a flow diagram for a process of verifying multiple pieces of sensitive information, consistent with embodiments of the present disclosure.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Aspects of the present disclosure relate to securing and verifying sensitive information, and more particular aspects relate to securing an individual's sensitive information while providing a corresponding trust group therewith. While the present invention is not necessarily limited to such applications, various aspects of the invention may be appreciated through a discussion of various examples using this context.

Embodiments of the present disclosure are directed toward providing control over identity information in a manner that can provide flexibility and security. For instance, government identity cards provide a host of useful identity information. Much of this information, however, can be surplus for any

particular transaction or verification. A retailer needing to verify that a customer's name matches that of a credit card may not need information about the customer's address, age, weight or other information on the card. A seller of age restricted goods (e.g., alcohol, cigarettes or firearms) may need to know that the customer is older than the restricted age, but not their address, actual age or other information. Aspects of the present disclosure facilitate the presentation of subsets of the set of available information depending upon the particular need, while providing verification of the various subsets.

Certain embodiments are directed toward the use of a digital grouping, or set, of sensitive data elements for an individual. This set of sensitive data elements can function in lieu, or in addition, to identification cards by including similar information. The set of sensitive data elements can be stored on an individual's electronic device such as, but not necessarily limited to, a smart phone, computer tablet, laptop computer, smart card, radio frequency identifier (RFID) card or personal computer. A verification device can be configured to interact with the individual's electronic device to request, or query, the individual's electronic device for particular pieces of sensitive information. The devices can be configured to use digital signature modules that allow for different sets of sensitive information to be verified with respect to the originator of the sensitive information (e.g., a governmental agency) and with one another (e.g., all for the same individual).

According to embodiments, group homomorphism can be created and used in connection with digital signatures for sensitive pieces of information. The homomorphism can be useful for reducing concerns over privacy of the sensitive information by facilitating the selective use of different combinations of sensitive pieces depending upon the particular need. For instance, the group homomorphism can be used to ensure that, for different combinations of the pieces of information, a verifying party can confirm both the integrity of the data content for sensitive pieces of information and that they are for the same individual.

Embodiments of the present disclosure make use of an identifier that is common between sensitive pieces of information that belong to the same individual and the same group. A different identifier can be used for each individual supported by the source of the sensitive pieces of information. For instance, the sensitive pieces of information could be part of a government identification package that contains information traditionally contained on a physical identification card, such as a government issued identification card (driver's license or otherwise). Each person that is issued an identification package could also be issued a different (unique) identifier. As non-limiting examples, the identifiers could be alphanumeric numbers, numbers (binary, hex or otherwise), image files or other types of files. This identifier can then be used to create the group homomorphism and thereby allow individual pieces of sensitive information to be verified with respect to their individual content as well as their relationship to one another.

Various aspects of the present disclosure are directed toward the use of a material equivalence of two groups having homomorphism to a unique identifier (x). The homomorphism can be defined as $G \rightarrow H$ or $\phi_x(u+v) = \phi_x(u) + \phi_x(v)$, where ϕ_x is a digital signature of the data that includes the unique identifier x and for which there is a homomorphism for the data. For instance, the homomorphism can be represented by valid trust relationship for the digital signature of the combined sensitive elements (u+v) and also for the separate digital signatures of each element ($\phi_x(u+v)$ and $\phi_x(u) + \phi_x(v)$ are each valid signatures).

For instance, a first data element (u) could represent an image file for a photograph of an individual and a second data element (v) could represent the name of the individual. If function ϕ_x is used to sign the combination of both data elements (u+v), this results in a trust group G. The function ϕ_x can also be used to sign each data element with the identifier x to establish a group homomorphism to a group H (FIG. 4, 400):

Group Homomorphism

$G \rightarrow H$

$$\phi_x(u+v) = \phi_x(u) + \phi_x(v)$$

The trust for the data elements in groups G and H can thereby be equivalent pursuant to the group homomorphism. This can be particularly useful for establishing that data elements belong to one another despite having been individually signed. This can also allow for multiple permutations of super groups with appropriate trust relationships. Each super group can be defined according to the particular use and application, such as providing name and age in one instance and address and gender in another.

Consistent with embodiments, an image file of a photo for the individual can be used as the common homomorphism (x) for the corresponding set of sensitive data elements. For instance, the sensitive data elements can be represented by image files. This could include image files of textual data, such as name or birth date. A first group (G) could be created that is a combination of two or more images. A function can then be applied in which the common homomorphism (x) is included as part of the digital signature. A second group (H) can also be created by applying the function to each sensitive data element individually. Consistent with certain embodiments, the common homomorphism can be an image file (x). Trust for two data elements can be verified by a visual overlay of the image file (x) from each sensitive data element. A visual disparity, as would occur due to data being for different individuals or images captured at different times, indicates a failed trust. In instances where the one of the sensitive data elements is also a file for the image of the individual, this image can also be added as part of the visual overlay. In certain embodiments, this sensitive data element of the image file can have a different (e.g., higher) resolution than the image file of the identifiers.

Consistent with embodiments, a function $f: G \rightarrow H$ between two groups is a homomorphism when $f(xy) = f(x)f(y)$ for all x and y in G. The multiplication of xy is in G and the multiplication of $f(x)f(y)$ is in H, so the homomorphism from G to H involves a function that transforms the operation G to the operation in H. Examples of two homomorphisms include: $e^{x+y} = e^x e^y$ and $\log_a(xy) = \log_a(x) + \log_a(y)$. The log function provides an example of a binary operation of multiplication that can translate to a binary operation of addition for a function.

As non limiting examples, the data elements could be part of a virtual identification card. The virtual identification card can display a desired subset of data elements that are visible within a card like outline. This card could be used for purposes such as driver's licensing, governmental identifier cards, healthcare cards, insurance cards, credit cards, security identifier cards for businesses or government, and others.

Turning now to the figures, FIG. 1 depicts a block diagram for system useful for securing sensitive data elements, consistent with embodiments of the present disclosure. According to embodiments of the present disclosure, a trusted entity 124 system can be configured to provide information about a group of individuals in the form of a plurality of sensitive pieces of information about each individual. For instance, the trusted entity could be a government agency that traditionally

issues identification cards, driver's licenses, hunting licenses or similar items. A computer system of the trusted entity can access databases that contain sensitive pieces of information (sensitive element database **126**). Consistent with embodiments, the trusted entity can also use a set of identifiers for the individuals, which can be stored in identifiers database **128**. As discussed herein, the identifiers can take a number of different forms including, but not limited to, alphanumeric characters, binary strings, image files and combinations thereof.

Consistent with embodiments, the trusted entity system **124** can include a signature creation module **125**. Signature creation module **125** can be configured and designed to use the sensitive elements and identifiers to create a homomorphism relative to trust for a first group in which a plurality of sensitive data elements are analyzed as a single entity and trust for a second group in which the sensitive data elements are individual analyzed. For instance, the signature creation module **125** can be configured to use a function that signs each sensitive data element individually, but also using an identifier for the corresponding individual for this signature creation.

The signed elements and identifiers can then be provided, or uploaded, to electronic devices **102**, which can be owned by the individuals corresponding to the sensitive data elements. A variety of different electronic devices can be used including, but not necessarily limited to, personal computers **108**, smart phones **116**, tablets **120**, RFID cards, and smart cards (not shown). Each device can store one or more sets of sensitive elements **106**, **114**, **118**, along with a corresponding identifier. These sensitive elements **106**, **114**, **118** may then be used to provide verification of different attributes associated with the individual.

In certain embodiments, verification devices **104** can be configured to establish a communication link with one or more of the electronic devices **102**. This link can be made over a variety of different mediums and using various protocols including, but not limited to, the use of networks **110** (e.g., local area networks, wide area networks, the Internet and combinations thereof), direct communication links (e.g., near field communication (NFC), Bluetooth, IEEE 802.xx and combinations thereof). In certain embodiments, the verification devices can include computer servers **112**, handheld devices **122** or other electronic devices.

According to embodiments, verification devices **104** can query the electronic devices **102** for particular elements **106**. These queries can be limited so as to exclude extraneous sensitive information relative to the particular purpose of the query. For instance, a bartender may have a need to confirm that a person is who they say they are and that they are over 21 years old. Additional information, such as address, weight, gender and other, may not be required or even desirable. For instance, by limiting the query to only specified information by the individual and querying party can have confidence that unnecessary information will not be misused because it is not being provided.

In response to such a query, the electronic devices **104** can provide the appropriate elements along with the associated identifier. The verification devices **104** can be configured to apply a function that takes advantage of the group homomorphism created by the use of the associated identifier. This can facilitate the ability to verify trust between different sets of elements.

FIG. 2 depicts a flow diagram for verifying trust of sensitive elements of an individual, consistent with embodiments of the present disclosure. An individual's electronic device **202** can store a number of different sensitive (data) elements

204, **206**, **208**. As discussed herein, each of these sensitive elements can contain data about the individual (e.g., one or more of: a name, an address, a date of birth, license status, an image of the individual, a driver's license number, an expiration date and physical characteristics of the individual). Moreover, the sensitive data elements can also each have a corresponding signature, which was generated in a manner that creates a group homomorphism related to the trust between the different sensitive elements.

Verification device **212** can receive subset of the sensitive elements in response to a query. For instance, the verification device may receive (e.g., from a trusted entity database) and store local copies **214**, **216**, **218**, **220** of sensitive element (1), signature (1), sensitive element (2) and signature (2), respectively. The identifier **210** can also be provided and stored locally. A verification function can then be applied to confirm the authenticity of both the data and the trust between the elements.

For instance, the function can use the signature (1) and signature (2) to create digest (1) **224** and digest (2) **228**. Using a signature protocol, such as Digital Signature Standard (DSS) and corresponding algorithm (e.g., digital signature algorithm (DSA)), digest (1) and digest (2) can be generated by applying a public key of the trusted entity to decrypt the corresponding signatures. The verification device **212** can also create digest (1)' **222** and digest (2)' **226** from sensitive element (1) and (2), respectively. Consistent with certain embodiments, the digest' can be generated using a one-way (hash) function, such as secure hash algorithm-1 (SHA-1) or SHA-2. The second set of digests can also be generated using a function that takes advantage of the homomorphism derived from the use of the identifier with each sensitive element.

The verification device can be configured to compare **230**, **232** the digest derived from a signature with a corresponding digest derived from the content of a sensitive element. A match between digests can indicate that the data is authentic and can be trusted. A mismatch indicates a potential security or integrity issue with the data. As each comparison also verifies the identifier, a match also verifies that the sensitive elements belong to the same trust group. Two sensitive elements are depicted in FIG. 2, but additional sensitive elements can be received and verified using the group homomorphism that is based upon the common identifier.

The verifier can be notified of the results of the verification using a variety of different indicators. These can include, but are not necessarily limited to, displaying text or graphics (e.g., "fail" or "success"), generating audio (e.g., tones or voice), showing a visual disparity between two images (e.g., disparity of images of different individuals) and combinations thereof.

FIG. 3 depicts a flow diagram for signing sensitive data elements using a homomorphism relating to a trust between the elements, consistent with embodiments of the present disclosure. A set of sensitive data elements for an individual (e.g., Jane) can include a variety of different attributes and information about the individual including, but not limited to, a picture **302**, an age **306** and other info **308**. A signature creation module (e.g., signature creation module **125**) can use a homomorphism that associates a common identifier (ID) **304** each of these sensitive data elements.

Consistent with embodiments, a digest **312**, **314**, **316** can be created for each of the sensitive elements using a digest function **310**. As discussed herein, the digest function can include the use of a hash function and can create a homomorphism by adding the identifier to each piece of sensitive information to create an identity element and before creating the corresponding digest. For instance, the identifier could be

a number that uniquely identifies the individual (Jane). The digest function **310** can append, or otherwise add, the identifier to the data content of each sensitive element (to create an identity element) before applying a hash function, such as SHA-1 or SHA-2. In another instance, the identifier could be an image file of the individual (Jane). The digest function **310** could integrate the image file of the identifier with each sensitive element before applying a hash function. This integration could be at the binary level, at an image level (e.g., by merging the image of the identifier with an image of content of the sensitive data) or at other levels. The signature module can then encrypt each digest using a private key encryption algorithm **318** in order to generate signatures **320**, **322** and **324**.

The resulting signatures can be provided along with the sensitive elements and identifiers to the proper individuals. For instance, Jane could receive a smart card that stores this information. The information could also be uploaded to an electronic device, such as a smart phone, tablet or computer. A software application could also be loaded onto the electronic device in order to coordinate communications with a verification device.

FIG. 4 depicts a flow diagram for using a homomorphism that is based upon image files of individuals, consistent with embodiments of the present disclosure. Consistent with certain embodiments, the group homomorphism **400** can be based upon an image file containing an image of the individual associated with a set of sensitive data elements. For instance, a verification device may receive two pieces of sensitive information **404**, **406** (sensitive data elements), which can be a subset of the available information to prevent unnecessary disclosure of the remaining, unused, sensitive information. These sensitive elements may include binary information **408**, **412** for each sensitive data element as well as an image file **410**, **414** (identifiers).

Individuals may attempt to mix sensitive elements from different individuals as a deception. For instance, a first individual (Jane) may attempt to use sensitive information of Jane (**408**) and at the same time use sensitive information (**412**) that is for a second individual (Joe). For instance, Jane may be under 21, while Joe is over 21. Jane may be attempting to deceive a bartender by providing her identity information (**408**) with Joe's age information (**412**).

In order to successfully verify (**402**) the sensitive information of Joe, Jane will provide Joe's identifier (binary image file **414**). In order to successfully verify (**402**) the sensitive information of Jane, Jane will provide her own identifier (binary image file **410**). Various embodiments are directed toward an additional trust verification in which the images **416**, **418** are merged **420** to produce an overlay **422** from the image files **410**, **414**. This overlay can be displayed to the verifier. If the image files are for different individuals, the verifier will be able to see the visual disparity in the overlay **422**.

In certain embodiments, the images **416**, **418** can also include a (graphic/textual) visible representation of the sensitive information **408**, **412**. The overlay **422** can thereby include and display the desired subset of information as well as the visual overlay of the images. Various embodiments also allow for the use of additional information as to whether or not the verification succeeded (e.g., graphics, text or audio that indicate a failed or successful verification).

In certain embodiments, one of the sensitive elements may also be an image file for the image of the individual. This image file can be identical to the identifier(s) or it may have a different resolution, but still be of the same underlying image. This image file can also be added to the overlay. Consistent

with embodiments of the present disclosure, the binary image files can be of a variety of images other than the corresponding individuals but yet uniquely linked to an individual including, but not limited to, text (e.g., text of an alphanumeric identifier).

FIG. 5 depicts a flow diagram for a process of generating a group homomorphism between multiple pieces of sensitive information, consistent with embodiments of the present disclosure. According to embodiments, this process can be implemented by a trusted entity system, such as the trusted entity system **124** of FIG. 1. The process can begin by selecting a current piece of sensitive information (POI) for an individual, per block **502**. The process can also include creating or retrieving an identifier for the individual, per block **504**. As discussed herein, this identifier can be used to create a group homomorphism in which the trust relationship between a first group (G) of the entire set of sensitive information of the individual is maintained for a group (H) containing subsets of the entire set of sensitive information of the individual.

Consistent with embodiments, a function can be applied that integrates the identifier with the current POI, per block **506**. This integration can take a variety for different forms including, but not limited to, appending the identifier as a binary operation, appending the identifier in the image space or applying a more complex function based upon these two inputs.

The integrated output can then be digitally signed, per block **508**. As discussed herein, the digital signature process can include the creation of a digest, which can then be encrypted using a private key encryption algorithm (e.g., consistent with DSS and DSA).

The system can then determine whether or not there are additional POIs, per block **510**. If there are additional POIs, the system can select/set the next POI as the current POI, per block **512**. The process can then proceed at block **506** using this new POI. If there are no additional POIs, then at **514** the system can provide or upload the signed POIs to the corresponding individual's device(s).

FIG. 6 depicts a flow diagram for a process of verifying multiple pieces of sensitive information, consistent with embodiments of the present disclosure. Consistent with embodiments, a communication link can be established between an individual's device and a verifying device, per block **602**. As discussed herein, a variety of different types of communication links are possible. In certain embodiments the communication link can be established in response to a selection (e.g., as part of a software application) made by the individual, the verifier or both. The communication link can also be established automatically, such as in response to bringing the two devices within a proximity and using near field communication (NFC).

In various embodiments, the verification device can be configured to query the individual's device for a subset of the available sensitive information, per block **604**. For instance, a verification device used by a police officer as part of a routine traffic stop may send query for name, license number, driving restrictions, but not query for home address information.

In response to the query, the individual's device can provide the requested subset of information, which is then received by the verification device, per block **606**. In addition, the verification device can receive an identifier that can be used to verify that the separate pieces of information belong to a single trust group.

The verification device can then verify each piece of information, per block **608**. This verification can include verifying using a provided signature and a function that uses the pro-

vided identifier in combination with the provided pieces of information. The verification device can then determine whether or not any of the signature-based verifications failed, per block 610. If so, then the verification process can be considered a failure, per block 612. If not, then the verification device can also verify that the pieces of information belong to the same trust group (using the homomorphism that is based upon the use of a common identifier), per block 614. If this verification fails, then the verification process fails, per block 612. Otherwise, the verification can be considered successful, per block 616.

As will be appreciated by one skilled in the art, aspects of the present invention may be embodied as a system, method or computer program product. Accordingly, aspects of the present invention may take the form of an entirely hardware embodiment, an entirely software embodiment (including firmware, resident software, micro-code, etc.) or an embodiment combining software and hardware aspects that may all generally be referred to herein as a "circuit," "module" or "system." Furthermore, aspects of the present invention may take the form of a computer program product embodied in one or more computer readable medium(s) having computer readable program code embodied thereon.

Any combination of one or more computer readable medium(s) may be utilized. The computer readable medium may be a computer readable signal medium or a computer readable storage medium. A computer readable storage medium may be, for example, but not limited to, an electronic, magnetic, optical, electromagnetic, infrared, or semiconductor system, apparatus, or device, or any suitable combination of the foregoing. More specific examples (a non-exhaustive list) of the computer readable storage medium would include the following: an electrical connection having one or more wires, a portable computer diskette, a hard disk, a random access memory (RAM), a read-only memory (ROM), an erasable programmable read-only memory (EPROM or Flash memory), an optical fiber, a portable compact disc read-only memory (CD-ROM), an optical storage device, a magnetic storage device, or any suitable combination of the foregoing. In the context of this document, a computer readable storage medium may be any tangible medium that can contain, or store a program for use by or in connection with an instruction execution system, apparatus, or device.

A computer readable signal medium may include a propagated data signal with computer readable program code embodied therein, for example, in baseband or as part of a carrier wave. Such a propagated signal may take any of a variety of forms, including, but not limited to, electro-magnetic, optical, or any suitable combination thereof. A computer readable signal medium may be any computer readable medium that is not a computer readable storage medium and that can communicate, propagate, or transport a program for use by or in connection with an instruction execution system, apparatus, or device.

Program code embodied on a computer readable medium may be transmitted using any appropriate medium, including but not limited to wireless, wireline, optical fiber cable, RF, etc., or any suitable combination of the foregoing.

Computer program code for carrying out operations for aspects of the present invention may be written in any combination of one or more programming languages, including an object oriented programming language such as Java, Smalltalk, C++ or the like and conventional procedural programming languages, such as the "C" programming language or similar programming languages. The program code may execute entirely on the user's computer, partly on the user's computer, as a stand-alone software package, partly on the

user's computer and partly on a remote computer or entirely on the remote computer or server. In the latter scenario, the remote computer may be connected to the user's computer through any type of network, including a local area network (LAN) or a wide area network (WAN), or the connection may be made to an external computer (for example, through the Internet using an Internet Service Provider).

Aspects of the present invention are described below with reference to flowchart illustrations and/or block diagrams of methods, apparatus (systems) and computer program products according to embodiments of the invention. It will be understood that each block of the flowchart illustrations and/or block diagrams, and combinations of blocks in the flowchart illustrations and/or block diagrams, can be implemented by computer program instructions. These computer program instructions may be provided to a processor of a general purpose computer, special purpose computer, or other programmable data processing apparatus to produce a machine, such that the instructions, which execute via the processor of the computer or other programmable data processing apparatus, create means for implementing the functions/acts specified in the flowchart and/or block diagram block or blocks.

These computer program instructions may also be stored in a computer readable medium that can direct a computer, other programmable data processing apparatus, or other devices to function in a particular manner, such that the instructions stored in the computer readable medium produce an article of manufacture including instructions which implement the function/act specified in the flowchart and/or block diagram block or blocks.

The computer program instructions may also be loaded onto a computer, other programmable data processing apparatus, or other devices to cause a series of operational steps to be performed on the computer, other programmable apparatus or other devices to produce a computer implemented process such that the instructions which execute on the computer or other programmable apparatus provide processes for implementing the functions/acts specified in the flowchart and/or block diagram block or blocks.

The flowchart and block diagrams in the Figures illustrate the architecture, functionality, and operation of possible implementations of systems, methods and computer program products according to various embodiments of the present invention. In this regard, each block in the flowchart or block diagrams may represent a module, segment, or portion of code, which comprises one or more executable instructions for implementing the specified logical function(s). It should also be noted that, in some alternative implementations, the functions noted in the block may occur out of the order noted in the figures. For example, two blocks shown in succession may, in fact, be executed substantially concurrently, or the blocks may sometimes be executed in the reverse order, depending upon the functionality involved. It will also be noted that each block of the block diagrams and/or flowchart illustration, and combinations of blocks in the block diagrams and/or flowchart illustration, can be implemented by special purpose hardware-based systems that perform the specified functions or acts, or combinations of special purpose hardware and computer instructions.

The descriptions of the various embodiments of the present disclosure have been presented for purposes of illustration, but are not intended to be exhaustive or limited to the embodiments disclosed. Many modifications and variations will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art without departing from the scope and spirit of the described embodiments. The terminology used herein was chosen to best explain the prin-

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ciples of the embodiments, the practical application or technical improvement over technologies found in the marketplace, or to enable others of ordinary skill in the art to understand the embodiments disclosed herein.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for protecting sensitive pieces of information stored on a device of an individual and using a device identification system, the method comprising:

applying, for each sensitive piece of information, a function that integrates an identifier of the individual with a respective sensitive piece of information to create a respective identity element;

digitally signing each identity element with a signature to create a trust group; and

uploading the identity element and signature to the individual's device using an application that is configured to provide a subset of the sensitive pieces of information in response to a query.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising creating the identifier using an algorithm that maintains uniqueness between identifiers corresponding to a plurality of individuals.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the identifier is an image file of the individual.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the identifier is a first image file of the individual and at least one of the sensitive pieces of information includes a second image file of the individual.

5. The method of claim 4, wherein the first and second image files are of a same image but at different resolutions.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the identifier is an image file of the individual and wherein the application is configured to provide the image file for each sensitive piece of information identified in the query.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein the function that integrates the identifier of the individual with the respective sensitive piece of information is based upon a homomorphism that establishes the trust group between the sensitive pieces of information.

8. A method for verifying sensitive pieces of information, the method comprising:

establishing a communication link between a verification device and a device of an individual that stores a plurality of sensitive pieces of information about the individual;

sending, to the individual's device, a query for a subset that includes at least two of the plurality of sensitive pieces of information about the individual;

receiving, in response to the query and at the verification device, the subset and an identifier of the individual;

verifying that each piece of sensitive information of the subset belongs to a same trust group by:

applying a signature algorithm to a first piece of sensitive information from the subset and to the identifier of the individual, and

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to a second piece of sensitive information from the subset and to the identifier of the individual, and verifying, based upon a result from the signature algorithm, that the first piece of sensitive information and the second piece of sensitive information belong to a trust group defined by the identifier.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the identifier is an alphanumeric character string.

10. The method of claim 8, wherein the identifier is an image file of a picture of the individual.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein at least one sensitive piece of information in the subset includes another image file for the picture of the individual, and wherein the method further comprises: verifying, based upon a result from the signature algorithm, that the first piece of sensitive information and the second piece of sensitive information belong to a trust group defined by the identifier further comprises overlaying the image files to facilitate detection of mismatches between the image files.

12. The method of claim 8, wherein the verifying that each piece of sensitive information of the subset belongs to a same trust group comprises:

creating a first digest by the applying a signature algorithm to a first piece of sensitive information from the subset and to the identifier of the individual, and

creating a second digest to a second piece of sensitive information from the subset and to the identifier of the individual,

deriving a first corresponding digest from a signature corresponding to the first piece of sensitive information; and

deriving a second corresponding digest from a signature corresponding to the second piece of sensitive information,

comparing the created first digest from the first piece of sensitive information and identifier with the corresponding digest derived from the signature corresponding to the first piece of sensitive information; and

comparing the second digest created from the second piece of sensitive information and identifier with the corresponding digest derived from the signature corresponding to the second piece of sensitive information,

wherein a match between said first digest and derived corresponding first digest indicates that a content of said first piece of sensitive information is authentic, and a match between said second digest and derived corresponding second digest indicates that a content of said second piece of sensitive information is authentic.

13. The method of claim 8, wherein the trust group is created using a group homomorphism $\Phi_x(u+v)=\Phi_x(u)+\Phi_x(v)$, where Φ_x is the signature and x is the identifier of the individual and u and v are each one of the sensitive pieces of information.

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